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ABSTRACT

After a detailed study of the scholastic retardation of Latin American children in Texas public schools due to the language barrier, the National Office of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) decided that this problem was of the utmost importance and a matter which the organization should work to correct. After obtaining the necessary authorization, pilot projects of the "Little School of the 400" were opened in various places, at LULAC's expense. Named after a list of 400 basic, indispensable English words for beginning non-English speaking children, the program enrolled 60 children in 2 schools in 1957. Nine more "Little Schools" were opened in 1958. In 1959, the Texas Legislature adopted a House Bill authorizing the program's establishment under the official title of "Preschool Instructional Classes for Non-English Speaking Children" with the understanding that these classes would not be exclusively for the Latin American child, but for the overall benefit of all non-English speaking children in Texas. More than 15,000 non-English speaking children were enrolled in 1960, and this attendance progressively increased through the summer of 1962 to over 18,000 children. Based on the program's efforts, recommendations concerning such items as a state mobile teacher unit law, job training school for elementary students, and Federal grants-in-aid were submitted to local, State, and national education agencies. (NQ)

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What Price EDUCATION ?

WHAT IS IT WORTH?

WHERE DOES IT BEGIN?

WHO DOES IT BENEFIT?

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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1962 REPORT
OF
THE LITTLE SCHOOL OF 400

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R E P O R T O F

THE LITTLE SCHOOL OF THE 400

(a) Reasons For Organization & Establishment

(b) What LULAC Has Done & Is Doing

(c) What TEXAS Is Doing

(d) Summary

(e) Recommendations

(f) Conclusion

Officially known in the Texas Public School System as the "Preschool Instructional Classes For Non-English Speaking Children", program was adopted by the Texas Education Commission and the 56th Texas Legislature in 1989 and went into effect in 1960

LULAC EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC.
Felix Tijerina, Chairman
904 Westheimer
Houston, Texas

ALFRED M. POTTS, 2d

REASONS FOR ORGANIZATION & ESTABLISHMENT:

"We shall leave behind our second-class citizenship . . . bitter resentments . . . corrosive hates . . ."

These were the goals that LULAC, under the chairmanship of your correspondent as National President, set for itself and the Latin American people of Texas in 1957, when it inaugurated the pilot projects of the "LITTLE SCHOOL OF THE 400", specifically designed to acquaint the Latin American children of this State with the basic English vocabulary necessary for them to enter their first year in school with greater ease and confidence.

The Background of The Problem: Widespread illiteracy; almost fanatical resistance to change; poverty, disease and bad housing due to the lack of job opportunities because of language difficulty that disqualified many except for the most menial tasks; the difference in culture and traditions, psychology and attitudes that resulted in frequent ethnic misunderstandings; reluctance on the part of some to acknowle their United States citizenship; an obstinate inclination and desire keep and perpetuate their old way of life, all of which resulted in a almost mass-group-withdrawal of the Latin American from the new dominant culture of the country; but which, eventually, led to the organization of educational, civic and patriotic groups such as the LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS (LULAC) in 1929, with the foresight to emphasize: (1) the acquisition and facile use of the official language of the country, (2) the importance of complying with our duties as citizens of the United States, and (3) stressing the need for a better and higher education for our children.

Under conditions such as described above, poor, separate schools and failure, for both teacher and student, on an average of 80 times out of every 100, was the inevitable result - and still is where such conditions exist.

Shortly, teacher and pupil simply stop making more than just a token effort and the student sits at his desk with a vacant stare, bored to death; wasting his own and the teacher's time; not to mention the taxpayers' money and, in the majority of cases, either drops out of school to become a common laborer and/or one more statistic in the Police or Welfare records of his or another community.

The pattern clearly shows: R-e-t-a-r-d-a-t-i-o-n and, according to the experts, a language and scholastic retardation exists wherever a non-English speaking child is found in a school grade lower than that corresponding to his age.

Although, since the establishment of the Preschool Instructional Classes For Non-English Speaking Children, in the Texas Public Schools in 1960, we have found many such children with other than Spanish names, mainly German, Czech, Polish, Chinese, Japanese, etc., we make no attempt here to state how many years the language barrier has held these other children back; but we can say that the most competent authorities on the matter have estimated the language retardation of the Spanish-speaking child anywhere from 1 to 4 years of his formative school life.

WHAT LULAC HAS DONE & IS DOING:

When your correspondent became the National President of LULAC, we began making the rounds of the State Offices of the Commissioner of Education, Dr. J. W. Edgar, the Labor Department, the Department of Public Welfare, the Department of Public Safety, etc., asking the heads

of the various Departments of the State, particularly Dr. Edgar because of his official position as Commissioner of Education, just what we could and should do to help ourselves and our people to become better and more enlightened citizens of this great Nation.

The most surprising bit of information we received was when the officials of the Texas State Teachers Association began to discuss the facts concerning the scholastic retardation of our children in the Public Schools due to the language barrier.

After a careful, serious and detailed study of the situation, the National Office of LULAC decided that this problem was of the utmost importance and a matter that our Organization should work to correct. Drawing on our own experiences as a child with the multiple difficulties we had encountered in our own struggle to earn a living, due to our lack of knowledge of the English language, we went to work on a solution to the problem that would eventually benefit all the non-English speaking children of the State of Texas.

The first step was the take the matter up with the Supreme Council of LULAC. Once the Supreme Council was convinced, we took the idea to our next National Convention. Promptly, the necessary authorization was obtained from the National Assembly; but, realizing that this would entail expenses that our National Treasury could not cover, we undertook the task of opening the pilot projects, in various places in and around the Houston area, at our own expense as our personal contribution to the general education of our children in Texas.

By this time, Mrs. Elizabeth Burrus, a Baytown, Texas, teacher had made up for us a list of what she considers the 400 basic, indispensable, words in English for beginning non-English speaking children. This list of 400 basic English words originated the idea of calling our Program the "Little School of the 400."

In 1957, the first pilot project was opened in Ganado, Texas, under the guidance of Miss Isabel Verver and a second project was opened in Edna, Texas. We had to wait 1 whole year to evaluate the results on the 60 children that received this first preschool training. The results were amazing. Only 1 child out of the entire 60 failed to pass his First Grade in regular school the first year !

Full of enthusiasm and confidence in the future results of our program, we went ahead in 1958 and opened up 9 more "Little Schools." This time all we had to wait was 4 months - and the results, again, exceeded our fondest expectations. Only 2 per cent of the children failed to pass their First Grade in school.

During this time we had been making a survey of the preschool programs that various School Districts, mainly Corpus Christi, McAllen, Eagle Pass, Freeport and Odessa, Texas, had developed and had reported astounding results from, together with unheard of economies in the administration and management of their financial affairs as they had eliminated the expense of re-training a child in the same grade two or three consecutive regular school years because of language difficulties.

This pinpointed the information furnished us by the Texas State Teachers Association. This type of program was feasible and practical, but no solution had yet been found for the other phase of the problem; that was that the most needed ingredient for its general success was the information of the public and its cooperation in it, and this was absolutely essential. But, we had to face the fact that our Public Schools had no means to disseminate this information to the general public.

In 1958 and as a direct result of the work that we had been doing thru LULAC, our Texas Governor, the Hon. Price Daniel, appointed your correspondent to the Hale-Aiken Committee, opening for us the opportunity to present our problem and its possible solution to the Texas Education Officials and, with their help and cooperation, to the Texas Legislature.

Our Texas Legislature was convinced on the basis of the factual information that we had on the tremendous impact that a program of this nature would have on Texas education, as well as the equally tremendous savings to our State and to our School Districts.

We count ourselves, indeed, fortunate to have been able to get our Texas 56th Legislature to adopt House Bill No. 51 authorizing the establishment of this program in the Texas Public Schools under the official title of "PRESCHOOL INSTRUCTIONAL CLASSES FOR NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING CHILDREN" with the further understanding that these classes would not be exclusively for the Latin American child, but for the overall benefit of all the non-English speaking children of Texas.

Through LULAC and private donations, in October 1959, we were able to employ an Executive Director to promote the program on a state-wide basis. Under his direction District Supervisors were also employed in San Antonio, Kenedy, Corpus Christi, Laredo and in the Houston area, to do the necessary promotional work among our people, even from home to home wherever necessary, and our Executive Director is still doing this work.

This promotional campaign enabled us to help the participating Districts enroll more than 15,000 non-English speaking children in the program in 1960 and this attendance has progressively increased through the summers of 1961 and '62 to over 18,000 children.

We are, indeed, fortunate to be able to say that we have one of the best State Public School Systems, here in Texas, in the country; but, again, we want to stress the fact that, although, our School Districts are doing the best they can; they can't do the job alone and we must put something into the program ourselves for the benefit of our children, our State and our Nation.

It is unfortunate, but it is a fact, that our Texas Education Agency has no funds available for this type of promotional work; so that leaves the responsibility squarely upon our own shoulders, as in the case of Wharton, Texas, which we mention in this Report.

WHAT TEXAS IS DOING:

We quote for you a letter from J. Warren Hitt, Texas Deputy Commissioner of Education: "Preschool Instructional Program For Non-English-Speaking Children. In accordance with recommendations of the Hale-Aiken Committee, the 56th Legislature authorized a program of preschool instruction for non-English speaking children. This program has operated two years. In 1960, 130 school districts participated employing 614 teachers with an enrollment of 15,805 children. In 1961, 158 districts participated employing 772 teachers with an enrollment of approximately 18,000 non-English speaking children.

"At the inception of the program, procedures were established to determine whether participation in the preschool program would assist these non-English speaking children in moving through the school program at a normal rate. Studies have shown that approximately 80 per cent of the non-English speaking children who enter first grade (without preschool training) have to spend two years in this grade before progressing to second grade. (Now) Approximately 80 per cent of the non-English speaking children who participated in the preschool program in the summer of 1960 moved through the first grade in one year." (Insertions and underscoring ours.)

NOTE: It is highly significant and important to us, since even some of our own leaders have expressed their skepticism and opposition to the "Little School" program, to find a marginal notation on this letter that says: "School of 400" - Lulac - Action research experimental type program. GOOD RESULTS." (Caps ours.)

Three of the immediate good results are: (1) a noticeable decrease in language retardation; (2) greater importance and value attached to education by Latin American parents, and (3) its consequent increase in school attendance; although we still such incidents as that reported from Wharton, Texas, recently, investigated by our staff: Program available for the benefit of our children; schools doing their utmost to arouse parental interest; but, this summer 1962, only 2 children attended preschool classes when there were 40 or more before. We promised the Wharton School Superintendent to cooperate in their campaign to announce the 1963 classes to help stimulate better attendance next year.

In many areas of Texas the problem of education, as it affects the Latin American child includes and is intimately related to the life of the migrant worker. These people constitute a very definite and special problem, involving over 30,000 children, according to the best estimates.

Frederick O. Sargent, in his article "EDUCATION OF CHILDREN OF MIGRATORY WORKERS", has this to say: "Language retardation of Spanish speaking scholastics has amounted to as much as 3 to 4 years in some areas. This period has been recently reduced to 1 year or less principally through the development of techniques for teaching beginning pupils a 300-word English vocabulary as the first step in their formal education. Where this technique is applied during the summer before the first year of school, retardation may be eliminated. Campaigns are now being conducted to apply this speed-up system of teaching English throughout the areas where Spanish speaking Americans live." (Underscoring ours.)

The latest "REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT" by the President's Committee On Migratory Labor, states that: "In a 1958-59 Survey made by the Labor Department, of approximately 1,700 migrant children under sixteen years of age who were found to be illegally employed during school hours and who furnished information on the last grade attended, 66 per cent were in grades

below normal for their ages. A comparison of the attendance of these children by age indicates that the educational attainment is proportionately lower as age increases. Thus, 87 per cent of the migrant children, 15 years of age, were in grades below normal for their age compared with 40 per cent of the 8 year olds. This is, perhaps, the most distressing aspect of the migrant condition. Children who are unable to obtain the basic elementary education will probably never be able to rise above their present circumstances to enjoy a better life. In this manner, many migrants are caught in a vicious cycle." (Underscoring ours.)

"The only reliable way that migrant children (as, indeed, any other children) can prepare themselves for better lives (in their adult years) is by obtaining the education and training that will equip them to compete for better jobs. The nomadic life of the migrant child, however, makes it very difficult for him to obtain an adequate education. Very often local school authorities are (purposely) unaware of the presence of the migrants in a community. Even when their presence is (openly) known (and acknowledged) however, local schools often do not encourage migrant children to attend.

"Some school districts, already overcrowded and forced to operate on an inadequate budget, find it very difficult to absorb a large number of migrant children, especially when these children tend to be retarded as to school grade, or if they come from a culture that differs from the dominant culture of the community - sometimes even speaking a different language.

"Added to this reluctance on the part of some school officials to educate migrant children is the reluctance of some migrant parents to send their children to school. Often of low educational attainments themselves and desperately needing the money the children earn, migrant parents, when compelled to send their children to school, frequently move on to another community where school authorities are more lax. THE ONLY WAY TO HANDLE THIS PROBLEM IS TO IMPROVE (AND ENFORCE) CHILD LABOR AND COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE

SCHOOL LAWS AND THEIR ADMINISTRATION IN EVERY STATE AND LOCAL COMMUNITY, INCLUDING THE PROVISION FOR ADEQUATE BUDGETS, SO THAT CHILDREN WILL NOT BE DEPRIVED OF THE PROTECTION OFFERED BY SUCH LAWS MERELY BY MOVING ON." (Insertions, caps and underscoring ours.)

On March 8th, 1962, Texas Governor, the Hon. Price Daniel, told the TEXAS CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION OF MIGRANT WORKERS: "It seems to me that we should be able to agree on the need for a far-reaching educational program . . . It is my hope that this Conference may result in a meeting of minds on the direction we should now take to meet this need.

"There were 127,000 Texans in the migratory labor force last year - an increase of more than 20,000 over the year before. Migration in 1961 started in February and continued until June, with the largest number leaving the State during May. The migrants from Texas travelled to some 38 States, returning between September and the end of December. Most of them live in South Texas, south of San Antonio to the Border and the Gulf, with the heaviest concentration in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Nearly 95 per cent are of Mexican origin, and a language problem is common to many.

"Enrollment fluctuates as much as 250 per cent in some of the South Texas School Districts. Some areas to which the families migrate during the harvest season are unable to absorb the influx of students. The children spend two to six weeks in each school district on the average as their families move over the country. By the time they reach high school age most of them are three or four years behind scholastically, if indeed they have not dropped out of school altogether.

"This situation is saddening, and it results in a great economic loss for our State and Nation. However, these children are getting some kind of schooling - not what they are entitled to and not what we would like for them to have, but improvements are being made.

"The State Board of Education recently ordered a comprehensive study of the problems of these children and named a staff assistant to work ex-

clusively in this area.

"I AM PROUD TO HAVE ENCOURAGED THE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM TO TEACH AT LEAST 400 BASIC ENGLISH WORDS TO CHILDREN OF SPANISH SPEAKING FAMILIES. That program is now in effect in 150 Texas school districts and it is making it possible for hundreds of children to complete their first years in school in the regular time, without having to be held over in their grades because of a language barrier. Economically, this fact alone makes the program virtually self-sustaining. We cannot know how many of these children will remain to complete school who, otherwise, would have dropped out at an early age because of language difficulty. I think we can assume the number will be high." (Caps and underscoring ours.)

In its pamphlet "CHILDREN IN MIGRANT FAMILIES", the Children's Bureau, of the SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION, reported that: "The total estimated number of domestic agricultural migrant workers in the United States is about 500,000 - including those that migrate within States as well as between States. THIS NUMBER HAS NOT DECREASED SIGNIFICANTLY THE PAST 10 YEARS - NOR IS IT LIKELY TO IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

"An estimated 175,000 to 225,000 children under 18 migrate with their families. A similar number of children of migrant workers do not migrate with their families. Thus, the total number of children under 18 whose parents are migrant workers is estimated between 350,000 to 450,000.

"Economically, the migrant farm worker occupies the lowest level of any major group in the American economy. In 1957, domestic migrants on the average worked 131 days (including 16 days of non-farm work). Their average earnings were $859 for the year . . .

"Children of migrant workers have fewer educational opportunities than any other group of children in our society. Their educational attainment and that of their parents is the lowest of any group."

S U M M A R Y :

The foregoing quotations from the most competent authorities available blend cause and effect into a complete picture of a sad and shameful situation as a whole. They pinpoint LULAC's repeated contention: That lack of education brings not only physical and financial misery, but moral and intellectual deprivation as well.

It is our further contention that: In cosmopolitan America, every community has non-English speaking children. Therefore, the need for Preschool Instructional Classes For Non-English Speaking Children is a national as well as a local need and that our failure to cope with the situation in a more effective way is fast assuming the proportions of a national disgrace.

We have repeatedly pointed out that our Federal Government, through our Displaced Persons Act, has brought, and is bringing, into our Country, tens of thousands of persons from all over the world that must learn the official language of the country in order to live here and get along with their new neighbors; whose children, especially, must be trained in this type of speed-up-oral-English-language program in order to get them adequately started in their new environment.

The letter from our Texas Deputy Commissioner of Education clearly shows what the Preschool Instructional Classes For Non-English Speaking Children are doing, and have done, the past two years and how many children are - today - enjoying the benefits of this program which is a direct result of LULAC's "Little School of the 400."

But, in Texas especially, it is absolutely essential for us to grasp the fact that there are approximately 1,400 School Districts, out of which at the present time, according to all official records, all that our Texas Education Agency has been able to reach is 158 districts, or a mere 10 per cent of the total. This clearly shows that we are barely scratching the surface and that our State, as well as our local School Authorities, need all the help

we can possibly give them.

NOTE: After various interviews between our Executive Director, Mr. Jake Rodriguez, of San Antonio, some of our State Legislators and other State Officials, we have reasons to believe that the Preschool Program may be transferred from an optional to a required status in our Public School System. This means every District in Texas will have the program for the benefit of our non-English speaking children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the foregoing stated efforts, experiences, research and practical knowledge of the problem and purely as a layman; we, respectfully submit the following Recommendations to our local, State and National Education Agencies, Boards and Departments:-

(1) A National Reciprocal School Attendance Law-

establishing the right of every child to receive an Attendance & Progress Certificate from every School District, in his State or any other, where he may attend school, so that at his return to home base he may continue the scholastic progress he is entitled to instead of being held back to his original grade because of absence.

(2) A State Mobile Teacher Unit Law-

enabling all States to establish Mobile Teacher Units, to be employed in the fields wherever necessary, patterned after those of the State of Colorado.

(3) Job Training School For Elementary Students-
to offer overgrown, over-age, elementary students the opportunity to train for jobs where high scholastic attainments are not required in order to discourage drop-outs.

(4) Federal Grants-in-Aid-
that, on request, will enable School Districts in general, via their respective State Boards of Education, to defray expenses of Preschool Instructional Programs for Non-English Speaking Children and/or such other temporary or intermitant Programs as may be deemed necessary to the continued scholastic progress of resident, immigrant and/or migrant children.

(5) Constant Improvement & Strict Enforcement-
of Child Labor and Compulsory School Attendance Laws as recommended in their "REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT" by the President's Committee On Migratory Labor.

C O NC L U S I O N :

Beginning with the beginner, the Little School of the 400 promises for our citizenry the magic key to success and happiness through the creation and fostering of aspirations for ever higher education and, what's more important, to open the way for their basic preparation for future intelligent service to the Community, the State and the Nation.

To the Nation, it will undoubtedly add uncounted thousands of new citizens, year after year, better able mentally to serve our National Defense; better prepared to fullfill their obligations and responsibilities without ever becoming a burden and a drain on their community. To their neighbors, the businessman, industrialist, professional and politician, these new citizens will be better customers and partisans, with greater buying power, because they will be better workers, better producers; in a word, they will be more fit citizens for a better and more progressive, truly representative

self-government; real assets to the American Way of Life.

Because, the completion of his education from a good sound start enables the recipient to fit better into the general scheme of things in his society - to produce more, to earn more; to help society more as a humane, enlightened, social being.

Under such conditions, the chance of his becoming a public charge, either penal, diseased or illiterate is lessened, and this will, automatically, result in a more apprppriate expenditure of our taxes that need no longer be channelled, as heretofore, towards welfare and/or correctional facilities and practices, but may, instead, be used for sound, progressive and positive programs for the common good.

Since the propaganda-and-public-information work necessary to adequately promote this program on a National, State and local, grassroots, level, not only in Texas but in every State our people reside in, and migrate to in search of a livelihood, entails expenditures over and beyond our present financial means; we hope and pray that our LULAC EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC., will be considered worthy and deserving of your financial as well as moral support; that in your heart of hearts you may want to aid in the eventual elimination of these conditions detrimental to our position of leadership among the Nations of the World; at the same time that we open new horizons, a fuller, richer and happier life for our future citizens and, in the final analysis, for our State and for our Nation.

Respectfully submitted

Felix Tijerina

Felix Tijerina, Chairman
LULAC EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC.

LULAC EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC.

THE NEED: $60,000.00 per year.

THE PURPOSE:

To help get more than just 150 Texas School Districts, and as many other States as possible, to actively participate in the Preschool Instructional Classes For Non-English Speaking children; to work in and with said States and Districts so that all such children may be reached with the benefits of this program.

HOW:

Employing civic-minded, dedicated public-relations men and women in "districts" of so many counties each, to aid School District Superintendents in their work with organized groups such as Lulac, P-T-A's, etc., organize civic and educational committees where necesary; coordinate local publicity through newspapers, radio and TV Stations, etc., and contact parents of all non-English speaking children in the community.

WHO ADMINISTERS FUND:

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